

OrdnanceReports

News updates from around the world



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Saddam, son may have been at target of U.S. airstrike

by Patrick Peterson, Peter Smolowitz and Martin Merzer, Knight Ridder, Stars and Stripes

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A U.S. war plane Monday pulverized a “leadership target” in Baghdad believed to have been occupied by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and at least one of his two sons, U.S. officials said.

A U.S. military official in Washington confirmed that Saddam and his second son, Qusai, were the targets, but there was no immediate confirmation that they were inside the building during an attack so ferocious it carved a 30-foot-wide crater in the Mansour residential neighborhood.

Other reports said Saddam's oldest son, Odai, also might have been inside the building, which was reduced to rubble.

The attack occurred at 2 p.m. Baghdad time Monday, though its possible results and consequences were not learned until Monday night. Earlier Monday, Iraqi officials said nine people were killed and four wounded in the attack.

“We can confirm that a leadership target has been struck,” said Lt. Cmdr. Charles Owens, a U.S. military spokesman at U.S. Central Command in Qatar. “We have absolutely no way to confirm that Saddam Hussein was inside.”

Said one defense official at the Pentagon: “Even if we got the big guy, we wouldn't know for a while.”

U.S. and British officials said Monday that an earlier airstrike apparently killed Saddam's top commander in southern Iraq, a man known as Chemical Ali because he ordered a poison gas attack that killed thousands of people in 1988.

In the latest attack, officials said “real-time” information from unidentified intelligence sources was rapidly passed to U.S. military officers at Central Command headquarters, who swiftly authorized the air strike on the building.



Buildings in the al-Mansour neighborhood of Baghdad lie in ruins Monday afternoon, April 7, 2003 after a U.S. warplane dropped four bunker-busting bombs on the site where Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was believed to be meeting with his sons. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

A B-1 bomber dropped four satellite-guided, 2,000-pound Joint Direct Attack Munitions (also known as JDAMs) on the building, U.S. officials said. Two houses were destroyed and four others damaged, Iraqi officials said.

American officials said the ongoing destruction of Iraq's communications systems has compelled top Iraqi officials to communicate with each other using Thuraya satellite phones. Signals from those devices can be easily intercepted by U.S. spy planes and teams on the ground.

Teams of CIA and other intelligence officials inside Baghdad have been using the telephone transmissions to locate top Iraqi officials and eavesdrop on their conversations, officials said.

On March 19, President Bush authorized what was called a “decapitation” airstrike on a suburban Baghdad compound where

continued on page 2

Saddam, son may have been at target of U.S. airstrike continued

Saddam and his sons, Odai and Qusai, were believed to be staying.

After several weeks of uncertainty, most U.S. analysts concluded that the three survived that attack.

The provocative, dramatic development came as U.S. Army soldiers spent the night in one of Saddam's main presidential palaces and 10,000 U.S. Marines surged into the capital's outskirts — and as U.S. officials suggested that major combat could be nearing an end in Iraq.

"The hostilities phase is coming to a conclusion," Secretary of State Colin Powell said Monday. Another leading indicator: Gen. Tommy Franks, who commands the allied force from a base in Qatar, spent much of Monday visiting his troops in Iraq.

At the same time, experts tested chemicals that could prove that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction. U.S. officers said they found substances that preliminary tests determined were the nerve agents sarin and tabun and the blister agent lewisite.

If additional testing confirms the presence of such chemical agents, the discovery at a compound near the city of Hindiyah, about 60 miles south of Baghdad, would be the first proof that Iraq has been hiding banned weapons of mass destruction — a primary justification for the war.

In Washington, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld cautioned that initial reports and tests are often inaccurate. "Almost all first reports we get turn out to be wrong," he said.

Some military officers at the scene said the material could be the residue of pesticides; others said they believed nerve agents are present. About a dozen soldiers and two journalists, including Knight Ridder reporter Tom Lasseter, said the substances made them ill or caused blotches on their skin. More sophisticated tests will be conducted in coming days, Rumsfeld said.

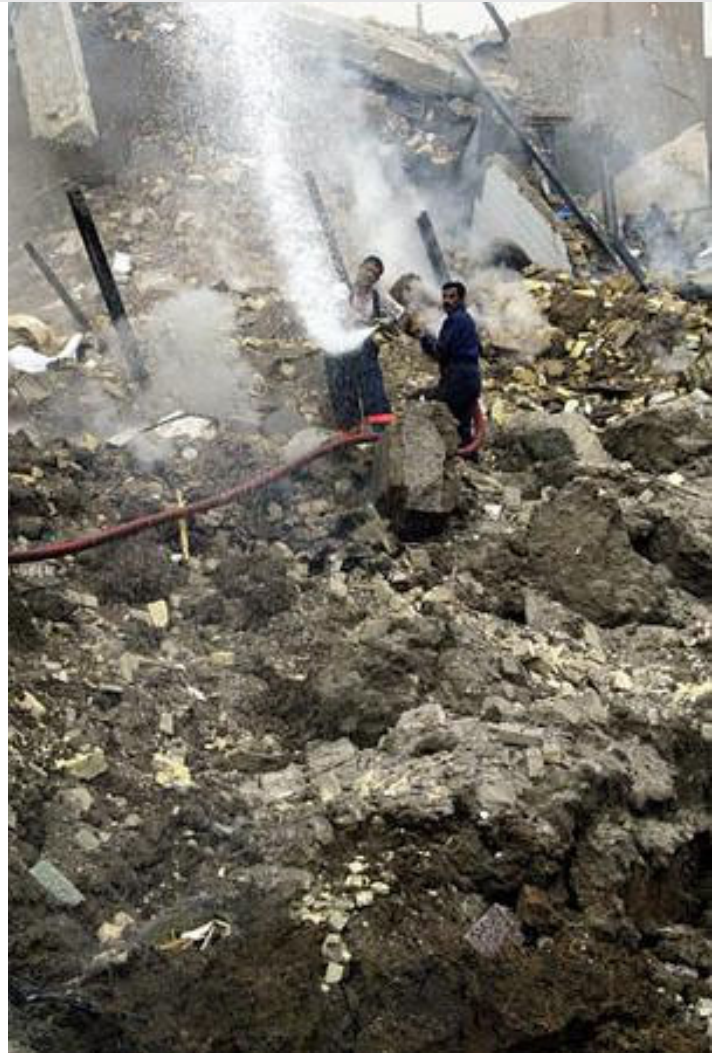
In another major development, U.S. and British officials announced that allied bombs almost certainly had al-Majid, known as "Chemical Ali." A member of Saddam's inner circle, al-Majid ordered a poison gas attack that killed thousands of Kurds in 1988.

"We believe that the reign of terror of Chemical Ali has come to an end," Rumsfeld said. "To Iraqis who have suffered at his hand ... he will never again terrorize you or your families."

Other officials said they would await further examination of the human remains found in a building in Basra where al-Majid and other Iraqi leaders were said to be meeting.

"Until they do the DNA I am not going to speculate," said Col. Larry Brown, operations chief for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. "This guy has been like Freddy Krueger. We've killed him four or five times."

In Basra, British troops consolidated their control of the southern city of 1.3 million people, but hundreds of residents indulged in



Iraqi firemen use water on the crater left by a U.S. bombing in the Al Mansour neighborhood of Baghdad Monday afternoon, April 7, 2003. The bombing targeted a site where Saddam Hussein and top aides were believed to be meeting. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

widespread looting — breaking into the central bank and retail shops and setting fire to a hotel.

Further north, 10,000 U.S. Marines streamed across makeshift bridges and floated aboard amphibious vehicles, crossing a tributary of the Tigris River and rushing into the outskirts of Baghdad near the Rashid military airfield. Army forces already held important strategic and symbolic positions in the heart of the city.

And so, early Tuesday, fending off sporadic enemy fire, large numbers of allied forces occupied key precincts of both Baghdad and Basra, Iraq's two largest cities. Both cities were virtually encircled by U.S. and British troops.

"What we're trying to do is surround the city," Brown said of Baghdad. "Keep the rats in and the reinforcements out."

continued on page 6

Iraqi regime: ‘systematic disregard for the law of war’

by Gerry J. Gilmore, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 7, 2003 — Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s regime is disobeying long-established rules for military conduct during wartime, senior DoD officials asserted here today.

“The Iraqi regime is not complying with the Geneva Conventions,” noted W. Hays Parks, special assistant to the Judge Advocate General for the Army. Parks and Ambassador Pierre-Richard Prosper, U.S. ambassador for war crimes issues, are experts on the law of war and the Geneva Conventions. The two officials outlined Iraqi regime violations of the rules of warfare to Pentagon reporters.

Parks pointed out that Hussein’s regime has mistreated U.S. and coalition prisoners of war captured during Operation Iraqi Freedom. And Iraqi fighters who dress as civilians and fake surrenders only to attack coalition troops, and who commit other illegal acts, he emphasized, have clearly violated the rules of warfare.

“I should note that in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 the Iraqis mistreated U.S. and coalition prisoners [of war] and forces in numerous respects,” Parks pointed out. Those included

physical abuse and torture, forced propaganda statements, food deprivation and denial of International Committee of the Red Cross access until the day of repatriation.

The Iraqis also mistreated Iranian POWs during the Iraqi-Iranian war from 1980 to 1988, Parks said.

Saddam’s government, Parks asserted, “has thus displayed a pattern of systematic disregard for the law of war.”

Based upon initial reports – including those in the media – coming from the current war in Iraq, “it appears Iraq has once again committed violations of the Geneva Conventions and related laws of war,” Parks declared.

He used three examples of violations. In the first, Parks pointed out Iraqi television and Al-Jazeera airing of an Iraqi regime-produced videotape of deceased U.S. or coalition service members. The tape depicts fundamental violations of the Geneva Conventions, such as prohibitions on pillage and ill treatment of the dead, and the duty to respect the personal dignity of all captured combatants. The video also possibly shows violations of prohibitions against willful killing, torture, inhumane treatment or the willful causing of great suffering or serious injury to the body or health of prisoners of war.

The second example is the issue of Iraqi television and Al-Jazeera network airing a tape of U.S. soldiers answering questions in humiliating and insulting circumstances. This was designed,



W. Hays Parks (right), special assistant to the Judge Advocate General of the Army, responds to a reporters question concerning the distinction as to what constitutes a military uniform in combat. Iraqi troops have been described as being in violation of the rules of war by shedding their uniforms and attacking coalition forces while wearing civilian clothing. Joining Parks at the lectern is Ambassador Pierre-Richard Prosper, U.S. ambassador for war crimes issues. The two subject matter experts briefed Pentagon reporters, April 7, 2003, on various issues relating to the Geneva Convention, the laws of war, the handling of prisoners of war, and war crimes. DoD photo by R. D. Ward.

according to Parks, to make the soldiers objects of public curiosity in violation of the prisoner of war convention.

In the third example, he discussed reports that the Iraqi regime has sent forces carrying white flags as if to indicate intention to surrender. This practice repeated an illegal act used by the Iraqi military in the 1991 Gulf War. Parks also talked about reports of Iraqis forces dressed as liberated civilians in the current campaign to draw coalition forces into ambushes. He said these acts of perfidy, or treachery, are among the most fundamental violations of the law of war, endangering coalition forces and innocent Iraqi civilians.

And Parks thinks “there are likely to be additional violations.”

The position of the U.S. government “is to do everything in its power to bring to justice anyone, who, by action or inaction, is responsible for violations of the law of war,” Parks pointed out.

As was done in the 1991 Gulf War, Hays noted, steps are now being taken to commence an investigation and compilation of evidence of Iraqi regime complicity in war crimes.

Ultimate disposition of this investigation will depend on the evidence collected, identified violations and the individuals who come under U.S. control, Hays said.

continued on page 4

Iraqi regime: 'systematic disregard for the law of war' continued

In the current war "we have seen a systematic pattern of abuses committed by the Iraqi forces to the extent that we can call them 'textbook,'" Ambassador Prosper noted.

The Iraqi regime has not only repeatedly violated the laws of war," Prosper declared. "It has also demonstrated "a complete disregard for human life."

"By blurring the distinction between combatants and civilians," the ambassador continued, the Iraqi regime "has caused numerous civilian casualties and has put thousands ... of Iraqi civilians in harm's way."

The Iraqi people have suffered greatly as a result of these abuses, Prosper pointed out. Iraqi regime forces, he added, have directed mortar- and machine-gun-fire upon civilians as they've tried to flee to coalition forces' control.

Prosper said there have been myriad reports of Iraqi regime use of human shields, where civilians have been involuntarily placed in harm's way and, at times, killed.

Regime forces fighting in civilian clothes also put innocent Iraqis at risk, Prosper declared.

Hussein's regime has also placed military weaponry in schools, hospitals, mosques and nearby historical landmarks, the ambassador stated. He added that reports from Iraq indicate regime ambulances have been used to transport "death squad" members and other irregular forces across battlefields.

Iraqi civilians "have been forced into combat at gunpoint," Prosper pointed out, "or also by threat of death to their family and [other] loved ones." There also are reports of summary executions of military deserters, he added.

As U.S. and coalition troops battle regime forces in Baghdad, "we must brace ourselves for additional abuses," Prosper noted.

Complicity in atrocities and war crimes isn't new for Saddam's followers, the ambassador observed, since "the regime has a long history for the past few decades of inflicting violence and death upon its civilian population."

While the primary mission of U.S. and coalition troops remains defeating Saddam's regime, the troops will also be securing and preserving evidence of war crimes and atrocities that they uncover, Prosper remarked.

"As President Bush has stated: 'War criminals will be prosecuted,'" Prosper emphasized. "The day of Iraq's liberation will also be a day of justice."

For any war crimes committed against U.S. personnel, Prosper noted, "we will investigate and we will prosecute. And, when feasible, this includes war crimes committed against U.S. troops during the Gulf War, he added.

For war crimes committed against the Iraqi people during the current conflict, Prosper said, "we'll explore the range of options available and work to ensure that justice is achieved for the Iraqi people."

There must be accountability for any atrocities or war crimes committed in Iraq, he reiterated, noting that U.S. and coalition officials "will work with the Iraqi people to create an Iraqi-led process that will bring justice for the years of abuses" under Hussein's regime.

"In short, it is in our view that we must reinstate the rule of law within Iraq," Prosper declared. "We must not tolerate the abuses of the Iraqi regime and deem them as 'business as usual.'"

Modern law of warfare instituted during the Civil War

by Gerry J. Gilmore, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 7, 2003 — President Abraham Lincoln instituted the modern law of war practiced by U.S. troops and most nations' militaries today.

Lincoln directed Professor Francis Lieber to write a code of wartime conduct for Union forces during the American Civil War, W. Hays Parks told Pentagon reporters today. Parks is the special assistant to the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General for law of war matters.

The Lieber Code "really formed the foundation for everything we have in our modern law of war today," Parks pointed out, noting that the code was published as U.S. Army General Orders No. 100 in 1863.

Lieber, German-born American professor of history, political science and law, researched world military history in creating his rules of warfare, Parks noted.

"And I think that's a very important point here," he said, "to

understand that this is the way nations feel that they should conduct military operations."

Since the publication of the Lieber Code, there have been a number of other initiatives to codify proper conduct on the battlefield, Parks noted, such as The Hague conventions in 1899 and 1907.

Parks said a number of Geneva Conventions held over the years developed rules for the protection of war victims.

Today, he noted, there are four 1949 Geneva Conventions. The first deals with military wounded and sick on the battlefield; the second, with military wounded, sick and shipwrecked, Parks said.

The third refers to prisoners of war and their protection, he continued, and the fourth deals with enemy civilians or civilians in enemy hands.

"They are still in effect," Parks pointed out.

continued on page 5

Marines fighting for military airport

by Nicole Winfield

CAMPAS SAYLIYAH, Qatar (AP) - U.S. Marines battled to seize Baghdad's second airport Tuesday and were encountering intense resistance in some places around the Iraqi capital, an American general said.

Members of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Unit were on the grounds of the Rasheed military airport and were working to secure it after destroying Iraqi tanks and armored personnel carriers, Brig. Gen.

Vincent Brooks said.

"There was resistance, most of it leading to it, and there's also resistance beyond it," Brooks said at the daily Central Command briefing in Qatar.

The airport is in a "militarily significant" area near the Tigris River, he said. Taking the airfield would aid efforts to secure the Iraqi

continued on page 7

Modern law of warfare instituted during the Civil War continued

The 1949 Geneva Conventions were negotiated after World War II, Parks remarked, noting that 190 out of 194 nations in the world today are parties to them.

"That includes the United States and Iraq," he emphasized. In fact, he noted, more governments are signatories to the Geneva Conventions than there are member nations of the United Nations.

The protections "apply when the members of the armed forces of one belligerent nation or their civilians fall into the hands of an enemy belligerent," Parks explained. In the case of POWs, he added, this can happen through capture or surrender to enemy military forces.

POWs must be humanely treated, Parks pointed out, noting that any action or negligence causing the death of a POW or endangering his or her health is prohibited and is a serious violation of the convention.

Also, POWs must be removed from the battlefield as soon as feasible and at all times be protected from physical and mental harm, Parks said, adding that POWs must also be provided adequate food, shelter and medical aid.

POWs must be protected against acts of violence or intimidation, he pointed out, as well as insults and public curiosity.

Under questioning, POWs are required to provide only their name, rank, serial number and date of birth, Parks asserted. They may not be forced to provide any other information.

POWs may not be subjected to physical or mental torture, he emphasized, noting those who refuse to answer questions may not be threatened, insulted or exposed to unpleasant treatment of any kind.

Subject to valid security issues, POWs are entitled to retain their personal property and protective equipment, Parks remarked. These items, he said, may not be taken from a POW unless they're properly accounted for and receipted.

Representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross must be permitted access to prisoners of war as soon as practical, Parks pointed out. All POWs must be protected against assault including sexual assault.

Female POWs must be treated with regard due to their gender and, like all POWs, are entitled to respect for their person and their honor, he explained.

The United States and Iraq also are parties to the 1949 Geneva Convention on the Wounded and Sick, Parks noted. This convention, he pointed out, also deals with the protection and respect for enemy and dead on the battlefield. Warring sides are required to protect the dead against pillage and ill treatment, he noted, and to ensure that the dead are honorably interred, their graves respected.

Identity and other information, Parks noted, are provided to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Parks said American and coalition forces in Iraq conduct all operations in compliance with the law of war. And he pointed out that there's no other country that devotes more resources to training and compliance with the laws of war than the United States.

U.S. and coalition forces have planned for the protection and proper treatment of all Iraqi POWs under each of the Geneva Conventions, Parks noted. And he said such plans are woven into current allied operations.

America and its coalition partners detained 86,743 Iraqi POWs during Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Parks pointed out. These Iraqi POWs "were given all the protections required by the Geneva Conventions," he noted.

U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq today "are providing, and will continue to provide, captured Iraqi combatants with the protections of the Geneva Conventions and other pertinent international laws," Parks emphasized.

Iraq has not yet allowed International Committee of the Red Cross officials to visit with American and coalition POWs it now holds, Parks stated. He noted that American POWs captured during Operation Desert Storm weren't released by the Iraqis until the war had ended.

However, arrangements have been made to enable ICRC representatives to visit with Iraqi POWs held by U.S. and coalition forces, he said.

Saddam, son may have been at target of U.S. airstrike continued

Asked if elements of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division would remain at the presidential palace and other locations in Baghdad or withdraw, Navy Capt. Frank Thorp said: "Obviously, they don't feel they're vulnerable, as they're still in there."

Those accomplishments, combined with relative tranquility behind the front lines and modest gains in northern Iraq, inspired increasingly confident statements by U.S. officials.

"The circle is closing," Rumsfeld said. "Their options are running out."

Several reports said the Iraqi army's 10th Armored Division, based near the southeastern city of Amara, was ready to surrender en masse. Three other army divisions are believed to be nearby, but none has taken any action since the war began.

Rumsfeld acknowledged that Saddam's whereabouts were still a mystery, but said the regime has virtually disintegrated.

"We may not know if or where he is, but we do know that he no longer runs much of Iraq," he said. "His forces continue to surrender and capitulate. His regime is running out of real soldiers."

Franks, chief of the U.S. Central Command, visited troops in the south-central city of Najaf and other Iraqi locations. He told one group of Marines to "remember those we've lost and I also want you to remember what we've gained."

"Get it done and we'll be moving on," Franks said.

President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, meeting Monday in Belfast, Northern Ireland, concentrated on forging a plan for post-war Iraq. As they consulted, U.S. officials in the southern Iraqi port of Umm Qasr prepared for the arrival of retired U.S. Lt. Gen. Buck Walters, assigned to plant the seeds of an interim government.

"It is time for all of us to think about the post-hostility stage, how we create a representative government consisting of all elements of Iraqi society," Powell said. The Bush-Blair summit will continue Tuesday.

U.S. Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks warned, however, "there's still a great deal of hazard out there" on the battlefield, and more evidence of that flared Monday.

An Iraqi rocket slammed into an Army base on the southern outskirts of Baghdad, killing four people — two U.S. soldiers and journalists from Spain and Germany. On the eastern flank, two Marines were killed and three wounded when an artillery shell struck their armored amphibious vehicle as it approached Baghdad.

The official U.S. military death toll rose to 86, with more than 150 wounded.

In a near-miss, a surface-to-air missile was fired at the C-130 cargo plane carrying half the combat operations staff of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force as it flew from Kuwait to a new forward base

southeast of Baghdad.

The pilot fired off metallic chaff, a decoy, and dove steeply to duck the missile, fired from near Nasiriyah, the south-central city that has been the focus of resistance to the coalition forces.

In Baghdad, the day's action began around sunrise, when troops from the 3rd Infantry Division in more than 100 armored vehicles rolled into central Baghdad as warplanes provided cover against mostly disorganized resistance.

By the end of the day, at the domed New Presidential Palace, U.S. soldiers strolled under huge chandeliers, smoked cigarettes in a reception room, examined seized documents in a filing room and established a prisoner of war collection center in the courtyard.

In a central Baghdad square, U.S. Army tank crews used a 40-foot statue of Saddam for target practice, destroying it. They also occupied a parade ground where Saddam often reviewed his troops

During their brazen thrust into Baghdad, U.S. tank columns approached the Al-Rashid Hotel, until recently home to many foreign journalists, and passed close to the Iraqi Ministry of Information, according to U.S. officials.

Nearby, Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf asserted that the American invasion had been repulsed and its soldiers slaughtered.

"Be assured Baghdad is safe, secure and great," he said. "There is no presence of the American columns in the city of Baghdad, none at all."

As he spoke, a U.S. shell landed nearby.

A U.S. intelligence official said intercepted Iraqi communications indicate that military commanders are lying to their superiors about the situation. The intercepts, the official said, suggest that Saddam's son Qusai is still alive and may be in charge of Baghdad's defense, which they said could explain why Iraqi officers are afraid to tell the truth about U.S. advances.

Brooks and other allied officials said the Iraqis did manage to mount some resistance.

They damaged one bridge over the Diyala River, east of Baghdad, and fired artillery from the other side of the river, Brooks said.

"Some of the fights have been fights that are worthy of respect," he said, "for forces that unfortunately may be dying for a regime that does not have a future."

Soon, U.S. Marines arrived at that river, which runs east of Baghdad and flows into the Tigris.

Navy Seabees reinforced one bridge over the Diyala and threw a

Marines fighting for military airport continued

capital - and prevent the escape of high-ranking Iraqi officials - as forces loyal to Saddam Hussein turn increasingly to fierce urban combat, Brooks said.

Over Baghdad's international airport, seized last week by U.S. troops, a coalition A-10 "Warthog" warplane was shot down Tuesday, believed to be the first coalition aircraft downed by an Iraqi surface-to-air missile. The pilot ejected safely and was recovered by U.S. ground forces nearby.

Meanwhile, members of the Army's V Corps entered Baghdad from the north early Tuesday - the first reported movements of U.S. troops in the capital from that direction. Troops were previously known to have entered the capital from the south and southeast.

Brooks said the V Corps units' defeat of Iraqi forces positioned in the north "opened up an opportunity for us to continue operations on a different line toward the center of Baghdad from a different direction." He refused to elaborate except to say that the strike "may have opened a hole in the north" that commanders might exploit.

Saddam, son may have been at target of U.S. airstrike continued

second folding assault bridge across it, affording the Marines access to the opposite bank and Baghdad itself. Other Marines ferried across the river aboard 27-ton amphibious vehicles called Amtracs.

After suppressing small-arms fire, they found abandoned Iraqi weapons and ammunition and Republican Guard uniforms. They advanced toward Rashid Airport, across Baghdad from the international airport already occupied by the U.S. Army. They encountered Iraqi civilians who waved and cheered.

"I wasn't expecting people to be so friendly," said Lance Cpl. Casey Mattox, a Marine from Foley, Ala.

In recent days, hundreds of Iraqi prisoners of war from areas around Baghdad have been loaded into school buses and shipped to a temporary holding area a few miles from the south-central city of Najaf, according to U.S. military officials.

They appeared docile, drained of the will to resist their captor's demands that they kneel or stay quiet.

"These guys don't have any fight in them by the time they get to us," said Capt. Joe Murdock, commander of the 855th Military Police Battalion.

Peterson is with the Marines in Baghdad; Smolowitz is at allied headquarters in Qatar; Merzer reported from Washington. Also contributing were Knight Ridder Newspapers correspondents Scott Canon with the Army near Baghdad; Andrea Gerlin with the Marines outside Baghdad; Jessica Gynn at the Pentagon; Tom Lasseter with U.S. chemical detection teams in Iraq; Fawn Vrazo in Belfast, Northern Ireland; Juan O. Tamayo at Marine headquarters in Iraq; and Jeff Wilkinson in Kuwait City. Kuwait.

He said most of the Republican Guard defensive line ringing Baghdad's south had been destroyed, and that those Iraqi soldiers hadn't managed to move into Baghdad.

Baghdad itself was seeing intense urban combat that can result in deaths and injuries to civilians and bystanders. Two journalists were killed Tuesday when U.S. troops fired on the Palestine Hotel after receiving fire from the area.

"We know that as we conduct operations inside of Baghdad we should anticipate attacks from unexpected locations, that some of the military actions might be unconventional in nature, whether it's the use of car bombs or whether it's ambushes, the use of snipers, or certainly the consistent pattern we've seen elsewhere of using civilians as shields," Brooks said.

"We can only be reminded that the risk increases for the population as we do these operations," he added later. "But we have to remain focused on our objective of removing this regime before there's greater loss of life."

At times, the Iraqi forces include formations of 20 to 60 vehicles, including T-72 tanks or civilian trucks outfitted with military weapons. "Often, all of those vehicles are destroyed - any vehicles that are encountered," Brooks said.

Parts of the V Corps remained in the center of Baghdad. In addition to the northern thrust, other V Corps units carried out attacks Tuesday morning from the south - battling Iraqi tanks, armored vehicles, artillery and armed civilian vehicles.

It remained unknown whether Saddam and his sons were alive. On Monday, a U.S. warplane dropped four bunker-buster bombs and blasted a smoking crater 60 feet deep at a restaurant where they were believed be meeting.

"Like other places, it is possible that we may never be able to determine exactly who was present without some detailed forensic work," Brooks said. "That's one of the circumstances that we have to deal with as we go through this campaign."



U.S. Marines from Lima Company, a part of a 7th Marine Regiment, take positions on the runway during an operation to take over the Rashid air base in Baghdad on April 8, 2003.

Saddam strike plane told: ‘This is the big one’

by Will Dunham

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A U.S. B-1 bomber that aimed to kill Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in Baghdad dropped four satellite-guided bombs only 12 minutes after receiving orders that “this is the big one,” the plane’s weapons officer said on Tuesday.

“We used four weapons on the target,” Air Force Lt. Col. Fred Swan, told Pentagon reporters of Monday’s attack in a telephone interview from the region. “From the time we got the coordinates, it took 12 minutes to get the bombs on target.”

Swan, one of four crewmen on the aircraft, said two earth-penetrating GBU-31 2,000-pound bombs and two delayed-fuse bombs of the same size were used.

He said he did not know who was in the destroyed building, but that the air traffic controller in a nearby airborne radar plane told the B-1 jet’s crew before the daylight raid, “This is the big one.”

Other U.S. officials told Reuters that intelligence indicated that Saddam and his sons might have been in the building but that there was no immediate indication whether the Iraqi president or others might have been killed.

Swan said the B-1 had just finished taking on fuel from an aerial tanker aircraft and was heading to pre-planned targets when it received an emergency order to strike the bunker.

“We got the order that it was a high-priority leadership target,” he said. He said the jet 12 minutes later dropped two GBU-31 (guided bomb unit) bombs designed to penetrate deeply into the target before they exploded and, three seconds later, another two of the bombs



The U.S. military on April 7, 2003 bombed a Baghdad target where Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (L) and his sons Uday (C) and Qusay may have been. There was no confirmation yet that Saddam or his sons were killed in the strike, the official said. The three are seen in a still from video broadcast on Iraqi State television March 31.

with “25 millisecond” delayed fuses.

“I did not know who was there. I really didn’t care,” he added, stressing that he told the crew “this could be the big one. Let’s get it right.”

The swing-wing, four-engine jet bomber carries 24 of the satellite-guided “joint direct attack munitions (JDAMs) bombs. Swan said the aircraft later dropped 17 of the bombs on two other targets — one in western Iraq and one near Baghdad — before returning to its base in the Gulf region.



FRANKS IN IRAQ — Gen. Tommy Franks, U.S. Central Command, addresses the soldiers of 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, April 7, in An Najaf, Iraq. U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Joshua Hutcheson

Journalists traveling with units gain better understanding, officials think

by Ward Sanderson,
Stars and Stripes

Bob White, a retired Army colonel, remembers a friend wounded in Korea, a friend who was on his way to getting the Silver Star.

The infantryman, injured at one of the battles for Old Baldy hill, found himself shipped to Japan for treatment alongside CBS correspondent Lou Cioffi, who had been wounded by a mortar

round. The soldier was honored for gallantry. Cioffi, though a civilian, was awarded the Purple Heart.

This sort of sharing of hell by soldier and reporter “builds a rapport between the serviceman and the press,” said White, a veteran of Korea and Vietnam now living in Naples, Italy. “And it creates a mutual respect and appreciation.”

Though the United States is unlikely to decorate correspondents covering the war in Iraq — and the media less likely to welcome such gestures — the Pentagon says its policy of “embedding” reporters and allowing live coverage is working. While there is a risk of reporters leaking operational secrets, or the partnership of warrior and scribe sanitizing coverage, the military says such problems are rare in Iraq.

“The reporters who have been integrated with the units and getting to know the units and forming relationships are abiding by the ground rules,” said Army Maj. Tim Blair, the Pentagon spokesman managing the embed program.

Though some 600 journalists and crew are embedded with the military, only about five have been sent back from the front for violating ground rules. And though Geraldo Rivera caused a flap last week for drawing a map in the sand showing where troops might advance, Blair pointed out that Rivera was not part of the embed program.

Not everyone is so optimistic. Some critics claim embedded reporters chiefly serve to circulate propaganda and that they become too much part of the campaign, even to the detriment of reporting on their own exploits instead of the troops.

In a study released last week, the Project for Excellence in Journalism found 60 percent of TV stories from embedded journalists were aired live and unedited. Ninety-four percent of the stories were just the facts, as opposed to analysis. But 80 percent of stories featured the reporters alone and contained no troops or secondary sources.

Still, the study concluded the Pentagon’s embedding policy vastly improved coverage when compared with the reporting of other recent

conflicts.

Blair also denied the military is manipulating coverage, though reports may be delayed so that they don’t give the enemy advance notice of a strike or movement.

“They’re going to see things before they happen that are of serious operational concern,” Blair said of journalists. But in the end, he maintains that the reports are being filed.

What the military does hope to do is keep a lid on speculation and rumor: Reporters will see what happens themselves. And though the military denies it wants to spin coverage, it does want “informational dominance,” in Blair’s words, meaning a massive number of reports filed from units, as opposed to reports from roving or outright hostile media.

Blair’s only caution is that viewers and readers get just a slice of the battle when they follow one particular reporter.

“That journalist has one perspective,” he said, “and it’s only the perspective that’s in [his or her] line of sight.”

Not everyone believes embedding reporters is good. Lewis MacKenzie, a retired Canadian major general and commander of U.N. troops during the Bosnian war, is livid. In a recent commentary for the National Post, a Canadian newspaper, he wrote of his outrage at coverage of the landing of the 173rd Airborne Brigade in northern Iraq:

“I came close to trashing the television I was watching when the reporter explained to the world that his unit was extremely vulnerable as they had not been reinforced overnight and only had light weapons,” MacKenzie wrote. “I mean, why not just say: ‘Hey Saddam, come and get us, we are very lightly armed — is there anything else you would like to know?’”

One Special Forces veteran is also skeptical. He believes operations are sometimes televised before it’s safe to do so.

“I don’t think it’s malicious, but it’s immediate,” said Bill Kalmus, a retired Army lieutenant colonel living in Würzburg, Germany. During his days in Vietnam, he rarely came across reporters by nature of his covert job.

“I don’t think I’d want to have some reporter tagging along,” Kalmus said. And even if one did tag along, back then the report wouldn’t be available to the world, or the enemy, at the speed of satellite.

One analyst believes that, really, is what’s new with the news.

“What’s new this time is the fact that the military has allowed journalists to file and broadcast directly from the combat area,” said Jay Farrar, a retired Marine colonel and vice president of external affairs for the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

That isn’t so much a change in policy, Farrar believes, as it is a change in technology: People now live in a cell-phone and e-mail world.

continued on page 11

by Gunnery Sgt. Claudia M. LaMantia, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force

MARINE COMBAT HEADQUARTERS, Iraq

— For me, the war started the morning of March 20, when a missile loudly whistled over our heads and landed near the gate of our camp in Kuwait.

During the months leading to that, we had endless drills where, what we call the ‘giant voice-speaker,’ shrieked a loud siren. When the real thing came, it took us by surprise. The alarm sounded after the impact.

Everyone reacted with the precision of a Swiss watch, which had skipped a beat. Buildings shook, windows were shattered, people were tossed in the air, some were thrown off their chairs, but everyone was alive. God didn’t want us to join him that day, and I was happy for that. The next 26 hours were filled with an additional 19 trips to the bunkers, where we all met again wearing gas masks and chemical protective suits. Bonding took on a new light.

Two days later we crossed the border in Iraq. We drove through the night. Along the way we saw and heard civilians running up to our vehicles waving and asking for water [a flash-back from my Somalia days], buildings ruined, a flock of civilian media gathered by a freeway, anti-aircraft artillery [bad

Guys] in action, then the source of artillery disappeared under a bright orange glow ... lots of flares, convoys from the Marine Corps, Army and Britain. The whole way we were accompanied by dark clouds, from the raging oil fires purposely set by the Iraqi military, that blocked the moon and stars on and off all night.

By first sunlight we arrived. While setting up tents at our destination we witnessed Cobra helicopters unleash some firepower at an unruly source.

Our camp came to life quickly in the middle of what could be mistaken for Twenty-nine Palms, except for the war part. During our stay here we’ve gone through the ‘gas, gas, gas,’ ‘incoming,’ and ‘man the berm’ alarms. Rear Area Security quickly became Area Security.

A nasty sandstorm that left us looking like kids playing in bags of flour lasted only a day and a half, but the effects are still with us. The weather has turned from cool to blistering in only a few days.

I started to really dislike this place and became anxious to get this over with. News of the paramilitary cowardly tactics was feeding feelings of mistrust of all Iraqis for me.

Most of the time we are far away from the action but get instant news from battles, deaths, wounded, POW’s and the nasty Iraqi regime.

WAR DIARY

Meeting Mohammad

Still there is nothing like a face to face to validate the facts.

An Iraqi man, his wife and their daughter flew in a CH-46 helicopter to our camp today. They brought incredible news.

After cleaning up and getting settled in for the night they sat in folding chairs under some camouflaged netting surrounded by Marines who heard about the family’s heroic involvement to save an American woman POW. People from around the camp started to gather. They wanted to shake this man’s hand, say hello to his wife and give their little girl something, anything. They brought water, MRE’s, candies, crayons, chem lights [disposable glow in the dark lights], hats, chevrons, unit coins and an American flag. Many showed pictures of their families. They came to show their appreciation, they came to say thank you and to hear their story.

With his wife and daughter by his side, Mohammad explained, with great passion, some of the disgusting things the paramilitary had done in his city throughout this past week. How they shot a woman because she waved at a coalition helicopter then dragged her body through town. How they came and set up a military operations center in the city hospital. How he learned through a friend that a U.S. woman soldier was being held captive in the hospital where his wife worked.

His eyes grew wide and he clutched his chest saying, “I’m sorry, about Jessica,” as he recounted what happened to Pfc. Jessica Lynch.

Sitting at the edge of his seat using his hands to guide the conversation, he spoke about peeking through a window and witnessing how an Iraqi military officer slapped Jessica Lynch as she sat with her head, arm and legs bandaged. Mohammad said he then left the hospital and went to a checkpoint

outside the city where he cautiously approached some U.S. Marines. With raised hands he walked until he was halted. He told the Americans, “I have important information about Jessica.”

The Marines wanted more information, so he returned to the hospital and gathered as many details as possible. Meanwhile, men from the Iraqi regime had already paid a visit to his house; his wife and daughter had escaped and were staying with family. The next few days, Mohammad with the help of his

wife and friends, made maps detailing Jessica’s location, possible routes to her and number of paramilitary in the area.

When asked why he did this at such great risk, he replied, “I, we

continued on page 11

Family calls rescued POW ‘real cheerful’

by Colleen Barry

LANDSTUHL, Germany (AP) - Rescued U.S. POW Jessica Lynch is cheerful, strong-willed and thinking about home, family members reported Tuesday, expressing relief at the pace of her recovery from wounds suffered in Iraq.

Lynch's father, who arrived Sunday from West Virginia along with her mother, two siblings and a cousin, said the family was happy to discover that her condition was not as bad as they had feared.

"It really felt good once we'd seen her and seen the spirits she's been in," Gregory Lynch told reporters during the family's first news conference at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. "We knew she was going to be all right."

Deadra Lynch said her daughter was "real cheerful," emphasizing that the family was not pushing her to discuss her harrowing experience in Iraq.

Lynch, a 19-year-old Army supply clerk from Palestine, West Virginia, was captured March 23 after her 507th Maintenance Company convoy was ambushed in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah. She was rescued April 1 from a hospital in the city by U.S. commandos and airlifted to Germany.

Lynch was aware that members of her unit were killed, the family



Gregory Lynch, father of rescued U.S. POW Pfc. Jessica Lynch, is framed by his wife Deadra Lynch, left, and his son Gregory Lynch Jr., right, during a news conference at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Landstuhl, southwestern Germany, Tuesday, April 8, 2003. Jessica, who was captured in an ambush in Iraq and rescued by U.S. commandos, is under medical treatment in this U.S. military hospital. (AP Photo/Thomas Kienzle)

said, though it was unclear whether she had asked about their fate after being rescued or already knew about it.

continued on page 12

Journalists traveling with units gain better understanding, officials think continued

"What you're seeing coming out of the Gulf now is in line with what the American public has gotten used to in their daily life."

Farrar, who dealt with reporters during the first Gulf War and in Beirut as a public affairs officer, said he found that cooperating with the media helped the mission.

"I thought it was great having the press with the Marines. It was

Meeting Mohammad continued

love all people, Lebanese, Egyptian, Chinese, American and Marines."

Mohammad and his family want to stay in Iraq, his family, friends and business are here but as long as Saddam Hussein is in power he knows no one is safe, especially his wife and daughter. He says when Saddam leaves, the bad people will leave.

And that is why we are here. Mohammad says he loves America, but I think he loves our ideals, our freedom and our passion to fight for those things.

Today I saw and felt the reason we are fighting this war. This brave family will be under coalition protection for now but when Saddam and his regime fall they will be able to go home and begin a life without terror. He will begin a life with ideals and freedom. We already know he has the passion to fight for those things.

probably 80 percent positive, and 20 percent things that weren't necessarily good, but just facts of life

"The old saw that the media lost the Vietnam war is bogus."

The new era of streaming coverage, Farrar believes, poses little threat to security — and likewise he believes the media are getting information to the public without interference.

"The military and the media made an agreement that they couldn't put out certain kinds of information, and in the heat of battle they may not be able to transmit immediately," Farrar said. "But in reality, we're seeing real time or near-real time."

Despite his belief that working under fire bonds reporter and gunner, White remains pragmatic about security. Specifically, he criticized Rivera as well as Peter Arnett, whom NBC fired for criticizing U.S. strategy on Iraqi television.

"They didn't distinguish themselves, for sure," White said. Unfortunately, the Rivera incident reminded him of the old days.

"I had experience with the Korean War, with the 2nd Infantry Division ... one [reporter] was looking over my shoulder reading classified material, an after-action report. And we had to put a stop to that."

"It's given birth here," White said, "and it will last them the rest of their lives."



A Marine drags a picture of Saddam Hussein to a burn pile Monday in Qal'at Sukkar, Iraq. Photo by Chris Hondros, Getty Images.

Family calls rescued POW 'real cheerful' continued

Her family learned that eight members of her unit had been killed only from a reporter's question at a news conference in West Virginia before departing for Germany.

Doctors say Lynch is in stable condition in intensive care, where she was being treated for a head wound, an injury to her spine and fractures to her right arm, both legs, and her right foot and ankle. Gunshots may have caused open fractures on her upper right arm and lower left leg, according to the hospital.

Doctors hope Lynch will be well enough by the end of the week to endure the long flight home, Landstuhl spokeswoman Marie Shaw said.

Lynch underwent back surgery Thursday to correct a slipped vertebra that was putting pressure on her spinal cord. Since then, she has undergone several more surgeries to stabilize the fractures.

In a clear sign of progress, she got out of bed and sat in a chair for four hours Monday and was sitting again on Tuesday, Landstuhl hospital commander Col. David Rubenstein said.

He said she has begun physical and occupational therapy and has eaten solid food for the first time since her ordeal - turkey with gravy, French fries and carrots for dinner Monday.

"Pfc. Lynch is doing well and is in excellent spirits," Rubenstein said at the news conference.

Lynch's family appeared solemn during the 15-minute news conference outside a guest house on the hospital grounds, smiling only at times. They wore yellow ribbons to recall the fate of U.S. soldiers still in captivity or missing in Iraq.

Gregory Lynch Jr., 21, said his sister was "the same person" he knew before.

"She's just a bit tired now, and trying to get better," he said. "She's very strong, strong in the head. She's very determined."

And she wants to go home.

"That's the only thing she's been asking," her brother said.

Saddam's spokesman staying on message

by Maria Puente, USA Today

It's as if a bad Saturday Night Live skit is playing in Baghdad.

Iraq vows to destroy U.S. forces, says no surrender

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq vowed on Tuesday to defeat U.S. forces advancing in the heart of Baghdad with tanks backed by aircraft and artillery.

"We are going to tackle them and going to destroy them," Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf told reporters.

"They are going to surrender or be burned in their tanks," he said of the U.S. forces, asked if Iraq itself was considering surrender on the 20th day of the war aimed at toppling President Saddam Hussein.

U.S. tanks advanced in the center of the city from an overnight base in a compound of a presidential palace captured by U.S. forces on Monday. Aircraft and artillery pounded government buildings in the center of the city.

"Baghdad is bracing to pummel the invaders," he said.

Sahaf accused U.S. forces of attacking civilian targets in central Baghdad, including the offices of Al-Jazeera television. Jazeera said a cameraman was killed in a U.S. air raid.

"They are in an hysterical state and think that if they kill civilians they are going to win, they're not going to win," he said.

The Iraqi information minister stands in front of the cameras, a grim smile on his face, a military beret on his head, and declares forcefully, "There are no American troops in Baghdad!" Meanwhile, black smoke rises in the distance behind him, weapons fire can be heard all around, and American tanks rumble down streets only yards away.

Pay no attention to those tanks, Mohammad Saeed al-Sahhaf may as well be saying. There are no invaders, no troops — only "liars."

"The infidels are committing suicide by the hundreds on the gates of Baghdad," he said at one news conference. "We slaughtered them."

Who is this guy, and does he think he is fooling anybody?

Very possibly, he is, both in Iraq and in the wider Arab world, where he is seen as a media star and a heroic defender of Iraqi honor. To many in the Middle East, it doesn't matter that he is so wildly off the mark about the state of the conflict; the emotional power of his TV appearances counts far more than their accuracy.

"He makes everyone feel good even if we know it's all lies," says Dina Lahlou Ammouri, a Moroccan freelance journalist in Amman, Jordan. "He has this real charisma in the Arab world."

Elsewhere, Western military and diplomatic officials are shaking their heads and laughing contemptuously. In the Iraqi capital, the foreign news media, routinely incredulous at Sahhaf's bravado, have started calling him "Baghdad Bob." And not fondly.

"A lot of hot air," says a State Department spokesman, Philip Reeker.

At U.S. Central Command in Qatar, spokesman Navy Capt. Frank

continued on page 14



As American tanks advance along the Tigris River, the Palace of the Republic is struck in Baghdad. Photo by Tyler Hicks, The New York Times.

M88 crew joins in battle

At intersection, Army's mission turns to chaos

by William Branigin, Washington Post Staff Writer

BAGHDAD, April 7 — As Army troops barreled into the heart of Baghdad today, a unit from the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division was ordered to hold onto a key cloverleaf in the southern part of the city, a mission that sounded routine but quickly turned into five hours of killing and fiery chaos.

An Iraqi rocket-propelled grenade slammed into a U.S. ammunition truck at the intersection. As mortars aboard the ammunition truck exploded, they set a nearby fuel tanker truck ablaze, sending clouds of black smoke billowing into the sky. With the cloverleaf now an inferno, soldiers dove for cover or ran for their vehicles. Two Special Forces vehicles — Toyota pickup trucks — went up in flames.

"RPG on the roof! RPG on the roof!" yelled one soldier from beneath an overpass as he peered through binoculars at a building up ahead. M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles and other armored vehicles poured 25mm cannon and machine-gun fire at the target, but the incoming rounds continued.

"Get out of here now!" a sergeant bellowed.

At least two soldiers of the 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment task force were killed and four were wounded in the battles, which were fought without air support. Commanders said air missions were called off because of antiaircraft fire and the thick ochre haze that hung over the city. U.S. jets bombed targets in Baghdad later in the day, however.

Two of the wounded U.S. soldiers were victims of friendly fire when

an artillery round from a Paladin 155mm self-propelled howitzer fell far short of its intended target — the building where Iraqi snipers and militiamen were spotted firing rocket-propelled grenades. Instead, the round landed on the stone embankment of one of the cloverleaf ramps, about 50 yards from troops holding the intersection.

First Sgt. Chris French estimated that at least 25 Iraqis were killed in the fighting, and about 30 others threw up their hands and surrendered when infantrymen of the 3rd Battalion's Bravo Company cleared a series of trenches and bunkers in and around the intersection. The surrendering loyalists, members of Saddam's Fedayeen and other militia groups, were ordered to strip when they emerged from the trenches as a precaution against suicide attacks.

"Do not wave them to you!" Capt. Ronny Johnson, the Bravo Company commander, yelled at his platoon leaders as the first group of fighters came forward. "Make 'em strip! I want these guys butt-ass naked!"

Some of the captured loyalists were forced to remove all their clothing, but most were allowed to keep their underwear on. Several had been wounded before giving up.

One of the prisoners said he was Syrian, part of a group of 5,000 from his country that he said volunteered to defend Iraq, according to French. Hundreds of rocket-propelled grenade rounds were found in the trenches with the loyalists, he said.

An Army medic, Sgt. Mario Manzano of St. Petersburg, Fla., said one wounded prisoner offered him a thick wad of Iraqi dinars for

continued on page 15

Saddam's spokesman staying on message continued

Thorp says "one of the most powerful images" of the Iraq war so far was a TV split screen with Sahhaf on one side claiming there were no coalition forces in Baghdad, and on the other side, American tanks driving down the street. "At that point, I knew the war of words was over," Thorp says.

The wry putdown from the British: "I personally would like to know where he did his marketing degree," says Air Marshal Brian Burridge, commander of British troops in Iraq.

Sahhaf, 63, was Iraq's foreign minister for almost a decade. He is said to be on good terms with Saddam, but there is no love lost between him and Saddam's son Uday. Saddam removed Sahhaf as foreign minister in April 2001 and put him in charge of the Information Ministry after Uday's newspaper criticized him.

No matter what he says, Sahhaf is not crazy. He is sending messages to Iraqis and Arabs everywhere that the regime is fighting valiantly, says Patrick Clawson, an Iraq expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"If you're the typical Iraqi, you hear that the regime is still in charge,"

Clawson says. But, he adds, the typical Iraqi still has to "worry about the Baathists down the street; he can't open a window and scream, 'Saddam is dead!'"

Moreover, Clawson says, Sahhaf's frantic spinning is not exclusive to the Iraqis. "The Nazis were not exactly frank about the situation they faced in 1945. Every authoritarian regime does it."

Some in Sahhaf's intended audience have a sense of what is going on. "I believe Sahhaf exaggerates a little, but he needs to do that to reassure his people," a 25-year-old security guard in Cairo told Reuters news service. "He knows that he is talking to the American soldiers as well, so his words are part of the psychological war that's going on."

Ammouri, the Moroccan journalist, says: "I don't think we'll ever forget Sahhaf. I care more about his fate than I care about Saddam's."

Contributing: Donna Leinwand in Doha, Qatar; Gregg Zoroya in Baghdad; Vivienne Walt in Amman, Jordan; wire reports

At intersection, Army's mission turns to chaos continued

treating him. When he refused, Manzano said, the Iraqi man began weeping, thanked him for the medical treatment and denounced President Saddam Hussein in broken English.

After setting out from the junction of Highway 1 and Highway 8 south of the city this morning, the Bravo Company convoy drove past dozens of burned-out Iraqi vehicles and charred bodies on the way to downtown Baghdad and the cloverleaf it was assigned to secure. Three ammunition trucks, turned into smoking hulks by direct hits, lay in the highway's southbound lane, their cargoes of artillery and mortar shells strewn on the asphalt. One wrecked truck was pulling a trailer containing a mortar tube.

Civilian passenger cars and trucks were also among the blasted vehicles, some with corpses inside. One blackened body lay beside the wreckage of a motorcycle. Whether they were fighters heading south to engage the Americans or luckless civilians trying to escape the city remained unknown.

In one lane lay dozens of land mines, each secured onto the asphalt by a little mound of dirt.

Shortly before 10 a.m., word came over the company radio that Hussein had ordered all militants to join their units for "one last stand."

"You'll be moving into heavy contact," Johnson told his troops as the column drove past a huge portrait of Hussein at prayer.

Steadily, the convoy pushed past factories, military compounds and warehouses, all constructed of the same sand-colored brick and plaster. By the time the convoy reached the cloverleaf, the Bradleys, Humvees and support vehicles were under fire. The smell of cordite hung in the air. Muzzle flashes were spotted from buildings ahead.

"Be advised, the suicide bombers are out," Johnson told his troops on the radio.

"We've got enemies coming from the north!" shouted one platoon leader.

"Engage and destroy," Johnson ordered.

From then on, any vehicle that approached from the north was considered fair game. Several civilian vehicles were blasted with 25mm high-explosive rounds and machine-gun fire, their passengers assumed to be hostile.

Then came a radio report of enemy bunkers to the rear, south of the cloverleaf and even within it, a few dozen yards from the column's vehicles. Infantrymen poured out of their Bradleys and began moving down the trench line, occasionally firing into it. Fighters hiding in the trenches began to surrender, raising their hands and climbing out.

M88 crew opens up on enemy positions

From its spot beneath an overpass, the nose of an M88 armored

recovery vehicle occasionally ventured forward to poke out from the shadows. Staff Sgt. David Fields, the vehicle's commander, ordered his driver and mechanic to keep a sharp lookout. Through his binoculars, the mechanic, Pvt. Luke Tate, a 28-year-old farmer from Missouri, repeatedly picked out targets behind fighting positions on the ground or in the windows of tall buildings up ahead, and Fields opened up on them with his M-16 rifle or the .50-caliber machine gun mounted on his turret.

"There's still someone in that left back window," Tate said after directing fire at men he said were holding rifles and RPGs.

Fields, 38, of Lee's Summit, Mo., picked up his M-16 and fired. "They were firing AKs at us, but they didn't get any RPG rounds off," Tate said, referring to AK-47 assault rifles.

That luck did not hold. As the morning stretched into afternoon and the company stayed put, enemy combatants filtered into the area, opening fire on the Americans in and around the cloverleaf. Then, shortly after 1 p.m., a column of resupply trucks, including fuel tankers, pulled up from the south.

"We've got the whole support platoon showing up," French said on the radio.

"Who the [expletive] brought these guys all the way up here?" Fields muttered. "What a bunch of idiots."

"I didn't ask for them to come up here," French added. "We really haven't consolidated yet."

Johnson radioed that the resupply was for two other battalions that had gone ahead and were running short of ammunition.

"I'm fully aware of [that], but this is not a good place to stop," French replied.

He was right; the fighting intensified. Inside the M88, hot brass shell casings poured into the open hatch, covering the vehicle's floor, as Fields blasted away with his 7.62mm machine gun.

"This bitch is almost over," said the driver, Pvt. Damon Winneshiek, a Native American and a former blackjack dealer in a Wisconsin casino. "These guys are going to have to give up soon."

"I just don't believe we're sitting here," Fields said.

As the fighting continued, five naked prisoners were escorted back to the cloverleaf from a trench that the infantrymen cleared in the northwestern corner of the intersection. Then the RPG round arced into the ammunition truck, and it was bedlam.

Fields and Tate poured fire into the building about 400 yards ahead of them, Fields shooting his machine gun and an AT4 antitank missile and Tate firing his M-4 automatic rifle.

"Load up all the dismounts, a section at a time!" Johnson ordered. It

continued on page 16



HUMANITARIAN MISSION — Paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division break open boxes of humanitarian rations for distribution to residents of villages in central Iraq. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Eric Foltz

At intersection, Army's mission turns to chaos continued

was time to leave.

The infantrymen piled into their Bradleys. Once everyone was accounted for, the convoy resumed its northward push, the armored vehicles protecting the fuelers and ammo trucks needed by the other battalions up ahead.

All along the route, fighting continued, machine guns and Bradley cannons opening up on targets in front of the column and on both sides. At one point, an RPG round hit the side of a bridge just as the M88 was passing under it, missing the turret by several feet. Another RPG round struck the M113 armored personnel carrier of French, the company first sergeant. But it bounced off. A dud.

Arriving at Hussein's Sijood Palace, where they pulled up for the night, Fields ordered Winneshiek, the M88 driver, to knock down the wall and iron fence of a compound bordering it, using the 56-ton vehicle as a battering ram.

"You busted the palace wall," Fields told the quiet 25-year-old private afterward. "You can brag about that the rest of your life. You broke the palace wall."



Navy 2nd Class Petty Officer Raymond Paquette, left, listens to Marwan, 11, after Paquette and other members of his Seabees team constructed a playground for the locals near Umm Qasr, Iraq on Sunday. Photo by Roberto Schmidt, Getty Images



Army Staff Sgt. Chad Touchett, center, relaxes with comrades from A Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment after a search of one of Saddam Hussein's palaces in Baghdad on Monday. Photo by John Moore, AP.